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The Spy Who Came

It Was 1951 and No One Suspected That Was a Soviet Spy. But an Incident at a Washington Dinner Party Would Begin to Change All That.

By Verne Newton

It was intended to be no more than a particle in the mosaic of social gatherings in Washington that night, just one of many dinner parties on an unseasonably warm January evening. But it didn't turn out that way.

The small party in the rambling brick house at 4100 Nebraska Avenue played a role in unraveling what has become the longest-running and most baffling spy drama since World War II.

If some of the cast of characters who assembled around Kim Philby's dinner table on January 19, 1951, sound familiar, it is because their lives have become the stuff of best-selling spy novels. Including wives, there were twelve people at the party, but it was the spy-chasing reputations of the men that tied the group together. The dinner party included:

H.A.R. Philby, presciently nicknamed Kim by his father after the boy-spy in Rudyard Kipling's novel *Kim*. Philby, the party's host, was handsome and charming, a "man's man" at 39, with the air of tweed, pipes, and good whiskey about him. He had been decorated by King George VI for his outstanding intelligence work, and his appointment as British liaison to the CIA and FBI lent support to the widely held opinion that one day he would be chief of British intelligence.

Aileen Philby, two years older than her husband, although she looked ten years older, presided over the chaotic household with little support from Kim, who was helpless in domestic matters. This was the largest and most formal dinner party the Philbys had given in their fifteen months in Washington, and she had worked hard to make it a success.

Bill Harvey, 35, was considered by many the most knowledgeable man in America when it came to Soviet espionage. That apparently was enough to overcome his lack of the normal prerequisites for admittance to the CIA hierarchy. A native of Indiana, he was without an Ivy League degree, a trust fund, or a rich wife.

Years later he would be ushered into the Oval Office and introduced to President Kennedy as America's James Bond. Harvey did share Bond's love for guns, gadgets, action, women, and liquor, but the pear-shaped man with heavy eyelids more resembled Rodney Dangerfield than Sean Connery.

Libby Harvey, a thin and attractive woman from Kentucky, was never at home in the Washington fast lane of diplomacy, international dealing, and great public issues. Her way of feeling at ease in such company was to keep up with the men, martini for martini.

James Jesus Angleton, 34, had emerged from the war as America's best home-grown spy. He had joined the CIA in its infancy, and as the Agency's head of counterintelligence he would become one of its most powerful and controversial figures. Angleton, who had attended an English boarding school, Yale, and Harvard Law School (which he never finished), had become close friends with Philby since collaborating with him on wartime intelligence operations in London.

Cicely Angleton, who came from a prominent and wealthy Arizona family, was far more outgoing than her husband. A Vassar graduate, she was a pretty and talented actress who directed and occasionally acted in local stage productions.

Dr. Wilfrid Mann, 43, was a British-born nuclear physicist assigned to the British Embassy here as liaison to the CIA on atomic-energy intelligence. A graduate of St. Paul's and the Imperial College in London, he was sent to America in 1943 to work on the development of the atom bomb. His presence at Philby's dinner party would later lead to charges that he, too, was a Soviet spy.

Miriam Mann, like Angleton, had been born in Idaho. She had graduated from Berkeley with a degree in economics. An attractive woman, she seems to have been one of the few people who found Philby's charm resistible; she told friends she felt sorry for his "long-suffering wife."

Robert MacKenzie, 41, was the regional security officer for British intelligence assigned to the embassy in Washington. He was an Oxford graduate, and his father was headmaster at Eton, England's most prestigious boarding school. The only bachelor invited to the party, he was escorting Geraldine Dack, Philby's devoted, if rather plain, secretary.

Robert Lamphere, 34, was an assistant FBI director and one of the best spy-hunters in the US government. He had been a key figure in the case against Julius and Ethel Rosenberg. "A nice pudgy man from Ohio," as Philby described him, Lamphere had frequently discussed the tangled Rosenberg case with Philby.

Guy Burgess, a second secretary at the British Embassy, lived in Philby's basement apartment. He had not been invited to the gathering, but showed up anyway and became the catalyst that changed it from an ordinary dinner party to a historic event. The performance would be vintage Burgess, who had the same compulsion for scandal that Mozart had for the key of E-flat.

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